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As the pandemic has continued, greenhouse gas emissions have fallen precipitously. But while that may improve the picture for 2020, "a rebound would restore the long-term trend" toward rising emissions, the agency said.

In the United States and elsewhere, clean energy industries have suffered widespread layoffs, project cancellations, supply chain interruptions and anxieties about the future of investment. Last week, analyst GlobalData said total corporate investment in solar photovoltaics had fallen 31% from January to March compared with the same period in the previous year. And yesterday, the world's leading manufacturer of wind turbines, Vestas Wind Systems A/S, said it was firing 400 workers at its factories in Denmark and other European countries, citing "the extraordinary situation from the pandemic."

Prior to the outbreak, renewable energy sources had been growing at a pace that might be considered robust for any other industry. But polluting sources have kept up: Since 2010, renewables' share of all energy consumption has grown only slightly, to about 10% at present.

Over the next 30 years, that share will need to multiply sixfold to achieve a 70% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, said IRENA.

The plan would require about \$110 trillion in clean energy investment over that period, or about 2% of total gross domestic product, compared with the \$95 trillion currently required to fulfill national commitments.

Energy efficiency investments would make up the greatest share under the blueprint, at over a third of the total, followed by conventional renewables like wind and solar. Twenty-three percent of the total would go toward relatively new technologies for electrifying buildings and vehicles, storing energy, and producing green hydrogen.

Two other incumbent sources, hydropower and bioenergy, would also need to ramp up capacity substantially, while nuclear and fossil fuel power sources would occupy a more modest role in energy systems. And \$11.8 trillion in fossil fuel assets would have to be stranded, making new infrastructure expansions "short-sighted and increasingly risky," said IRENA.

"Economies need more than a kick-start. They need stable assets, including an inclusive energy system that supports low-carbon development," wrote La Camera in the report.

Global job losses in nuclear and fossil fuel power would be more than offset by new positions in renewable energy, across all regions, IRENA found. And GDP would grow an additional \$98 trillion by 2050, "greatly exceeding" the cost of energy transition policies.

The organization also outlined a separate "deep decarbonization" pathway for zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 that would contain similar proportions of spending for renewable technologies, but with an additional \$20 trillion in total investment.

"The global energy transition requires an unprecedented mobilisation of financial resources," the agency wrote.

But governments' response to the 2008 financial crisis showed that nations were capable of mobilizing huge amounts of capital in response to challenges, it added. "The uncharted territory of COVID-19 and its aftermath presents now another test of our shared resolve for a better future," IRENA said.

Wind tops coal in U.S. power, marking its rapid ascent

<https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2020/04/21/stories/1062928361>

Benjamin Storrow, E&E News reporter Published: Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Wind generated more electricity nationally than coal on three separate days over the past six weeks, according to an E&E News review of federal data.

Such a milestone would have seemed unthinkable a decade ago, when coal accounted for almost half of U.S. power generation. But the last 10 years have seen coal's position steadily erode due to a combination of slack electricity demand, mounting concern over climate, and increased competition from natural gas and renewables.

The novel coronavirus only has intensified the industry's pain. Steve Cicala, a professor who studies power markets at the University of Chicago, reckons that electricity demand is down 8% as a result of the economic lockdowns designed to halt the virus's spread.

Coal has borne the brunt of that decline. Wind and solar generation has been largely unaffected because they have no fuel costs — meaning that utilities turn to them when available. Natural gas prices, meanwhile, are mired near historic lows. That has left coal as the fuel to be curtailed.

Coal represented 16.4% of U.S. power generation over the last month, down from 22.5% the same time last year, according to the Rhodium Group, an independent research firm. Wind and solar generation, by contrast, rose from 10.7% of generation this time last year to 12.2%.

"I think in a lot of ways it's just sort of fast-forwarding to the future of our grid," Cicala said.

Wind generation has climbed by nearly a third since 2016 as new developments sprouted from the plains in Texas, Illinois and other states across the Midwest. Wind now generates more electricity than hydropower and is a primary reason why generation from renewables regularly outpaces output from coal.

Generation from the renewable trio of wind, solar and hydro exceeded coal in the first three months of 2020, according to a recent report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, a research group that supports a transition to clean energy.

There now appears to be days when wind generates more power than coal on its own. On March 8, wind output was almost 1.4 million megawatt-hours, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration data. Coal generation that day was 1.3 million MWh. The feat was repeated on March 28 and April 12.

Joe Daniel, a power sector analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the development mirrors trends in the United Kingdom, where wind generation quickly overtook output from coal plants. There are now days when the British grid is coal-free.

"This is the natural progression from an energy system making the transition from fossil fuels to cleaner forms of energy," Daniel said.

There are several caveats to consider with the wind surge. Coal generation typically falls in the spring, when electricity demand fades. Many utilities plan scheduled maintenance for the spring months. And coal generation still regularly exceeds wind.

Wind's new, if brief, parity with coal nevertheless demonstrates the long-term challenges facing the coal industry, said Mark Dyson, who tracks the power sector at the Rocky Mountain Institute. Coal plants are expensive to maintain. Those costs get harder for utilities to justify when they run less and less.

"We anticipate coal generators to continue the trend of announced retirements and perhaps faster than they otherwise would have, because they have been run less," Dyson said.

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'Not in our history.' Hurricanes hit targets farther inland

Experts see a way to help cities prepare for tropical storms that will likely be larger, less predictable and more damaging than hurricanes of the past.

One focus is on inland areas that have recently come within reach of stronger climate-driven hurricanes and stand to benefit from improved emergency planning and stronger building codes.

The proposed adaptation efforts come as intensifying storms could pose costly surprises to insurance companies and reinsurers because they draw their strength from warming sea surface temperatures. Those risks are often muted in statistical models used by insurers to estimate damages because they focus on historic storm data.

A study prepared by scientists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) notes that the costs of tropical cyclones have doubled over the last 15 years. The study predicts that the growing reach of storms could lash inland areas with winds that are as much as five times higher than historic storms; rainfall could increase by 45%.

"It means that inland areas could be hit much harder in future tropical storms," explained Cindy Bruyere, the director of NCAR's Capacity Center for Climate and Weather Extremes and the main author of the study.

Those projections will be true for coastal cities around the world, she said in an interview, explaining that until now, predicting which cities might suffer the most has been problematic. That's because the expanding reach of storms are based on the laws of physics and most statistical models are based on data drawn from storms of the past.

"If I'm an emergency manager for city X, I would want to know what is the potential damage for my city in the next couple of years," Bruyere said.

While coastal storms have different names around the world — whether hurricanes in the United States, cyclones in Australia, or typhoons in India and the western Pacific — the problem is the same for all of them: They're impossible to simulate in areas that have never been struck.

So existing statistical models used by insurers don't take into account the changing nature of future storms and the differing geography of a particular coastline, Bruyere said.

"Statistical models won't give you the connection between what a given coast is like and the interaction of where water is going to go and how much it's going to rain in that area," she said.

The growing disparity among projections of statistical models and the intensifying power and reach of recent storms attracted the attention of Insurance Australia Group Ltd. (IAG), the largest general insurance company in Australia and New Zealand. IAG helped NCAR finance a separate study focused on Australia's exposure to tropical cyclone damage.

Bruyere's team did a number of "impact scenarios" creating "synthetic cyclones" and running them at multiple coastal locations, finding that the most extensive tropical cyclone damage would come from the combination of "destructive wind speeds and heavier rainfall rates." Water intrusion could cause heavier damage to homes and buildings, the researchers predicted.

Cyclone Debbie, which hit the northeast coast of Australia in March 2017, helped prove the point. After pausing over the Coral Sea, where surface temperatures measured an unusually high 86 degrees Fahrenheit, Debbie made a perpendicular strike on the coast of Queensland, driving winds inland at up to 163 mph.

While coastal cities had time to evacuate, Debbie was the most destructive cyclone to hit Australia in 43 years. One town received 35 inches of rain in two days. Another received 21 inches in one day. Both were well south of the traditional inland storm warning area.

Fourteen people died, most of them from enormous floods driven by coastal storm surge and overflowing rivers. Total damage amounted to \$3.5 billion. Debbie became known as the "monster cyclone." "Why was aftermath deadlier than the storm itself?" asked one newspaper headline.

Warmer water, bigger storms

The gap between statistical projections and real-world results inspired another experimental application of NCAR's evolving "Hybrid Weather Research and Forecasting Cyclone Model." This provoked a fresh look at Superstorm Sandy, which crept up the New Jersey coast in late October 2012 and did something that until then was statistically improbable.

Most tropical storms historically approach the East Coast from the south, but Sandy hit the coastline from a nearly perpendicular angle. That made it one of the most damaging weather events in U.S. history. A 14-foot storm surge drowned parts of New York City's subway system.

Financial damages amounted to \$71.4 billion, including power outages for 8.5 million people and 20,000 canceled airline flights. Bruyere and her team used their cyclone model to create 198 storm scenarios that revealed how the unusual angle of impact helped multiply the storm's force and extended its reach.

"With this model, we can look at storms that are not in our history," Bruyere said. "We can place storms over warmer water than we typically have or near parts of the coast where storms don't typically make landfall, but which may be impacted in the future. The results will help us plan for some of the risks of a changing climate."

She believes the approach can be used globally to cover areas that experience heavy cyclones and those that don't — yet. Because warming waters are creeping toward the Earth's poles, moving north along the U.S. coastlines and southward along the coasts of Australia, more areas have to think about potential storm problems.

The team's modeling can help emergency managers grapple with the risks of climate change in areas that haven't experienced heavy storms, the experts said.

It may also help insurers and homeowners get a better grasp of their financial exposure as the reach of storm-driven winds and rain extends farther inland. While coastal communities are often protected by stricter building codes and flood defenses, inland areas traditionally regarded as being safer during storms have fewer protections.

There is at least one sign of progress. The massive impact of the novel coronavirus has put the U.S. Congress in a mood to help improve the nation's resilience to disasters (*[Climatewire](#)*, April 16).

And in the case of future coastal storms, climate change exacerbates disasters that have already begun to happen and that will, like the coronavirus, require future planning and more public awareness.

President Trump's recent decision to declare every state a "major disaster" because of COVID-19 and a 2018 law that requires states to set aside a percentage of disaster funds for projects that mitigate future hazards may set the stage for a multibillion-dollar program to give planners a more complete look at future storm threats.

Investment indices focus on companies with falling CO2

<https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2020/04/21/stories/1062927487>

Corbin Hiar, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, April 21, 2020

The company that manages the widely cited S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average indices is rolling out new products to help investors manage climate change-related risks and opportunities.

The Climate Transition Index and Paris-Aligned Climate Index were created by S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC (DJI) based on European Union sustainable finance guidelines.

"There is a growing urgency in Europe and globally to identify solutions that address the negative consequences companies and institutions face due to climate change," said Reid Steadman, head of sustainable investing at DJI.

The indices "provide transparency with respect to these consequences and investment strategies that address climate change risks and opportunities," he said yesterday in a press release.

Both require companies to reduce their annual carbon emissions by at least 7% and have limited exposure to the "physical risks from climate change," according to the indices' methodology. They are also heavily focused on tracking "potential climate change opportunities."

The most heavily weighted companies in the Europe-focused indices are, respectively, SAP SE, a German software giant, and ASML Holding NV, a Dutch semiconductor maker, according to data provided to E&E News. Other companies that are well-represented in both portfolios are French luxury goods conglomerate LVMH Moët Hennessy-Louis Vuitton SE, German automation firm Siemens AG, the British-Dutch consumer goods maker Unilever NV and the Spanish electric utility Iberdrola SA.

DJI intends for the portfolio of companies in its Climate Transition Index to be at least 30% less carbon intensive than its S&P Eurozone LargeMidCap Index.

Meanwhile, DJI's Paris index is guided by the United Nations' Paris Agreement, in which most countries vowed to pursue policies to limit global average temperature increases to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit. It is supposed to be at least 50% less carbon intensive than DJI's broader European index.

The Paris portfolio also aims to exclude companies that derive more than 1% of their revenues from coal, 10% from oil or 50% from natural gas.

In the coming months, DJI plans to launch additional climate-focused indices of companies based in the United States and other developed countries.

The indices are the latest tool asset managers can use to gauge the environmental sustainability of their investments. The World Wildlife Fund released a related product earlier this year that will screen for companies adhering to sustainable investing guidelines (Climatewire, Jan 31).

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Young climate activists slowed by pandemic, but not defeated

<https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2020/04/21/stories/1062926983>

Jamie Margolin had not expected to be sitting in her bedroom right now.

The high school senior had prom and graduation coming up, but so much more: a multistate bus campaign with fellow climate activists. A tour for her new book. Attendance at one of the massive marches that had been planned this week for the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

Then the pandemic arrived in Seattle, her hometown, and her plans went out the window.

"But still so much to do," Margolin said, perched in front of her computer for a video interview from that bedroom.

Like many other young activists who've helped galvanize what's become a global climate movement, Margolin is not letting a spreading virus stop her. They are organizing in place, from the United States to Ecuador, Uganda, India and beyond.

And while some fear they've lost some momentum in the pandemic, they are determined to keep pushing — and, for now, to use technology to their advantage.

Unable to gather en masse as they'd planned this Earth Day, these activists are planning livestreams and webinars to keep the issue of climate front and center on the world stage and in the U.S. presidential race.

One event, Earth Day Live, is being organized by a coalition of youth-led climate groups, including Zero Hour, of which Margolin is a leader (her Twitter profile includes the tag #futurepotus). As is the case with many other young climate activists, she got involved in the movement taking aim at the fossil fuel industry well before Sweden's Greta Thunberg became a global household name.

Online organizing is not as easy in some countries. In Uganda, activist Mulindwa Moses says only about a third of the population has Wi-Fi. Also under lockdown, the 23-year-old graduate student is waiting for his chance to return to planting trees and speaking to his nation's youth in person.

Like the original founders of Earth Day, he is among those who were first inspired by local issues — which they came to connect with global climate change.

While traveling in eastern Uganda, Moses met with families who had lost their homes in mudslides caused by torrential rainfall.

"I remember a girl I had a conversation with — she lost her parents and had to take care of her siblings. She was suffering so much," he said.

So last year, he began a campaign to encourage citizens to plant "two trees a week" and regrow their forests to combat deforestation and mudslides exacerbated by changing weather patterns.

In Ecuador, 18-year-old Helena Gualinga also has had to pause her world travels.

Born in Ecuador's indigenous Kichwa-speaking Sarayaku community — home to about 1,200 people in the Amazon — she says she learned from the example of her parents and her elders how to speak up for the rights of her people. Their fight has been against a government that they believe has given their land too freely to mining and oil companies.

"The energy I remember from my elders growing up" — at community meetings she attended with her parents when she was small — "was that my community was always very worried," she said.

Now, she added, "I know I have a voice."

Moses plans to run for his country's Parliament next year. "I want to fight to change the system from the inside," he said.

So does Max Prestigiaco, a freshman at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who is set to take his seat on the City Council of Madison, Wis. While fighting the coronavirus has used up much of local government's bandwidth, he still plans this fall to push the platform on which he ran — for his city to become fully sustainable by 2030. It is a lofty and some would say unattainable goal, but he is looking for "the impossible yes."

"Obviously, I wanted the alarm sounded decades ago before I was even born," the 18-year-old said. "But it's too late for incremental change."

Tia Nelson, daughter of the late Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), founder of Earth Day, said her father would appreciate the determination of this generation, as he did the young people who made the first Earth Day in 1970 a great success.

Though the senator went to Washington in 1963 and won support from President Kennedy, his daughter said it took several years to find backing for many of his environmental causes. He came up with the idea of Earth

Day, first envisioned as a nationwide "teach-in," after reading a magazine article about college students' impact on U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Later that same year, EPA was born.

"The climate youth movement today is having a significant and important impact in doing exactly what my father had hoped on the first Earth Day — that he would get a public demonstration sufficiently robust to shake the political establishment out of their lethargy," said Tia Nelson, climate director at the Wisconsin-based Outrider Foundation. "The youth movement 50 years ago did that. The youth movement today around climate change is doing the same thing." — *Martha Irvine and Christina Larson, Associated Press*

NYC lawmakers will call for fossil fuel divestment

<https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2020/04/21/stories/1062928327>

A dozen New York City lawmakers are throwing their weight behind efforts to force major Wall Street firms to cut financial ties with the fossil fuel industry.

Twelve members of the New York City Council plan to introduce a resolution tomorrow that urges banks, money managers and insurers to curb climate change by divesting from companies in the coal, oil and gas sectors.

Sponsored by City Council member Brad Lander, the resolution says that powerful financial firms are fueling "climate destruction" and calls on companies such as wealth mammoth BlackRock Inc., JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Liberty Mutual Group to stop funneling billions of dollars into planet-warming industries. Divestment, the resolution says, could "ultimately reverse the expansion of the sector worldwide."

Resolutions are not laws. So even if the measure passes, it would not require any action from the lenders, insurers or wealth managers that New York City does business with.

Even still, proponents say the initiative is significant because it sends a signal to the finance sector from leaders of the largest city in the United States — and the financial capital of the world.

"These are companies that the city of New York does business with, and indeed that many of us do business with," Lander said during a press conference. "Of course many of these companies are headquartered right here in New York City. So we have an extra responsibility to speak up and put pressure on them to change."

Twelve out of 51 New York City Council members have co-sponsored the resolution. Lander said he is "very optimistic" the measure will garner enough support to be passed.

City Council member Carlina Rivera is among those who backed the measure. Rivera said that climate change — not unlike COVID-19 — has drastically affected her district, which is located on the city's Lower East Side. She noted that her community was hit "very, very hard" by Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

"I'm a New York City Council member representing a district that is a coastline community. ... I know now more than ever how important it is going to be to look to the future and prioritize preparedness," Rivera said.

City Council member Helen Rosenthal, who for years has pressed New York City's pension funds to divest from fossil fuels, also co-sponsored the resolution. She said it's "incomprehensible" that the city is doing business with institutions that put New Yorkers — and the world — at risk from climate change.

"We're sending a crystal-clear message to Wall Street, and I think to the city, that fossil fuels belong in our past," Rosenthal said.

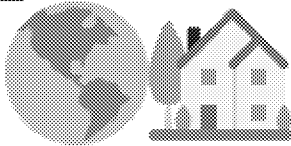
TRUMP'S EPA WEAKENS JUSTIFICATION FOR LIFE-SAVING MERCURY POLLUTION RULE

<https://popularresistance.org/trumps-epa-weakens-justification-for-life-saving-mercury-pollution-rule/>

As many Americans fight for their lives in the midst of a respiratory pandemic, the Trump administration Thursday axed the justification for a mercury pollution rule that saves more than 10,000 lives and prevents as many as 130,000 asthma attacks each year.

The new rollback leaves mercury emission standards in place for now, but changes how their benefits are calculated so that the economic cost takes precedence over public health gains, The New York Times reported. The move provides a legal opening to challenge other pollution controls even as evidence suggests that exposure to air pollution might increase one's chances of dying from the new coronavirus.

"This is an absolute abomination," former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) head under Obama and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) president Gina McCarthy said in a statement. "This final rule will increase the risk of more kids with asthma and brain damage, and more people with cancer. Undermining these vital safeguards now also directly threatens the people hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it even harder to breathe and putting people with respiratory illnesses at even higher risk."



NRDC

✓@NRDC

BREAKING: The @EPA just finalized a rule that threatens federal standards for mercury, lead and other toxic air pollution from power plants, risking more premature deaths, asthma and heart attacks. We will fight this!

<https://on.nrdc.org/2VdjRj2>



Protections that Curb Toxic Coal Plant Pollution Under Attack

The Mercury and Air Toxics Standards save more than 10,000 lives and avoid as many as 130,000 asthma attacks each year. Keeping them strong is more important now than ever.

nrdc.org

The Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS), first passed in 2011 when McCarthy headed the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, were the first of their kind to limit toxic emissions like mercury and lead from coal-fired power plants. These metals are particularly harmful to pregnant women and the brains of children.

Between 2006, when states first began controlling mercury, and 2016, when the MATS took full effect, mercury emissions declined 85 percent, The Washington Post pointed out. At the center of Thursday's decision is not the standards themselves, however, but how they were justified.

The Obama administration argued that, while the standards would cost the industry as much as \$9.6 billion a year, the country as a whole would save between \$37 billion and \$90 billion in public health costs. However, these calculations considered co-benefits of the mercury rule such as a decline in soot and smog-causing pollution.

In the rule released Thursday, the EPA said it was not appropriate to consider these side benefits.

"We have put in place an honest accounting mechanism," EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler told reporters Thursday, as The Washington Post reported.

According to the EPA's new accounting mechanism, the rule would cost industry \$7.4 to \$9.6 billion a year and only generate annual savings of \$4 to \$6 million in mercury-specific health costs, Reuters pointed out.

"One would not say it is even rational, never mind appropriate, to impose billions in economic cost in return for a few dollars in health benefits," Wheeler said, according to The Washington Post.

However, complying with the rule cost utilities less than Obama estimated, at a final price tag of around \$3 billion a year from 2012 to 2018. And many oppose weakening the rule now that they have already paid to comply with it.

"The repeal of the underlying legal basis for MATS introduces new uncertainty and risk for companies that still are recovering the costs for installing those control technologies," utility trade group Edison Electric Institute said in a statement reported by Reuters.

The only ones pleased with the rollback are coal companies. The 2011 rule encouraged utilities to switch from coal-fired plants to natural gas or renewable energy and therefore did more to phase out coal plants than any other Obama policy, The Washington Post pointed out.

"While the coal-fueled plants that were forced out of operation by this illegal rule can't be resurrected, it's an important lesson for the future," the National Mining Association said in a statement reported by Reuters.

The future is also what concerns experts who oppose the rule change out of worry it could be used to justify cutting controls on a variety of fossil fuel pollutants.

“That is the big unstated goal,” said David Konisky, a professor of public and environmental affairs at Indiana University, to The New York Times. “This is less about mercury than about potentially constraining or handcuffing future efforts by the E.P.A. to regulate air pollution.”

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Court Says EPA Should Limit Pulp Mills’ Toxic Mercury Releases

<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/court-says-epa-should-limit-pulp-mills-toxic-mercury-releases>

- Court rejects EPA’s argument of Clean Air Act reading
- Ruling a victory for environmental groups

The EPA should limit releases of toxic mercury, dioxin, and other pollutants from pulp mills because it failed to address them when it set industry standards in 2001, and when it revised them in 2017, the D.C. Circuit said Tuesday.

The 2-1 ruling was a win for environmental groups, which persuaded the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to reject the Environmental Protection Agency’s argument that the Clean Air Act allows it to regulate only some toxic pollutants from the pulp mill industry.

Pulp mills produce the raw material derived from wood to make paper products, and in the process can belch chemicals like methanol, acetaldehyde, and formaldehyde into the air.

The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to review and revise toxic emissions standards as necessary every eight years, the court ruled. More importantly, it said, the law requires the EPA “must address all listed air toxics the source category emits.”

“The 2017 rule failed to so,” Judge Cornelia T.L. Pillard wrote, joined by Judge Karen LeCraft Henderson. “We accordingly grant the petition and remand the 2017 Rule without vacatur, and direct EPA to set limits on the listed air toxics that pulp mill combustion sources are known to emit but that EPA has yet to control.”

Senior Judge David B. Sentelle dissented, saying the Clean Air Act “does not clearly require EPA to promulgate such missing limits at that time.”

The EPA said Tuesday it doesn’t comment on pending litigation.

Earthjustice attorney James Pew who argued the case for the environmental petitioners, said the ruling was “great news” as he digested the implications.

The American Forest & Paper Association that intervened on behalf of the EPA wasn’t immediately available for comment.

Legal Objections

Environmental groups represented by the nonprofit Earthjustice sued the EPA in December 2017, objecting to the agency’s reading of the Clean Air Act in a [regulatory review](#) (RIN:2060–AS46) of the toxic air pollution limits for the pulp sector in 2001.

They claimed the EPA violated the law nearly two decades ago by setting toxic air limits for some, but not all, pollutants from pulp mills, and then by again declining to extend those limits to additional pollutants in 2017.

The groups, including the Louisiana Environmental Action Network and the Sierra Club, argued the EPA should have used its 2017 review process to limit pollutants like mercury, dioxin, and others that the 2001 regulation didn't address.

The majority of the D.C. Circuit panel wasn't persuaded by EPA's argument that the point of the 2017 review was to consider if updates are needed for existing standards for the pulp mill industry, not to set limits for additional pollutants.

The agency also argued that environmental groups should have protested the lack of limits for certain pollutants when they were first set in 2001.

The Sierra Club has received funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the charitable organization founded by Michael Bloomberg. Bloomberg Environment is operated by entities controlled by Michael Bloomberg.

The case is *La. Envtl. Action v. EPA*, D.C. Cir., No. 17-1257, 4/21/20.

White House pushed EPA for looser 'forever chemical' regulation: documents

<https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/493703-white-house-pushed-epa-for-looser-forever-chemical-regulation>

The White House pushed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to loosen a potential regulation regarding a class of cancer-linked chemicals, according to documents released by Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.).

The chemicals, called PFAS, are also sometimes referred to as “forever chemicals” because of their persistence in both the environment and the human body. They can be found in a variety of products including raincoats, cookware and firefighting foam.

The documents released by Carper's office show that White House officials had pressured the EPA to make certain changes to a proposed rule that the agency was developing. Among the changes the White House had wanted in the now published proposal are inclusion of a "safe harbor" for importers of the chemical who may be unaware of the regulation and asking about a threshold level that would trigger it.

Carper, in a letter to EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, urged the official “to support the legal and scientific views of the EPA experts who have sought to promulgate these important protections for years, and resist the involvement of ... political officials who seek to weaken them.”

The senator particularly singled out Nancy Beck, a White House official with a background in the chemical industry who has been nominated to lead the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The administration has stressed, however, that these actions were part of an ordinary review process.

An EPA spokesperson told The Hill in a statement that the agency is often required to participate in an interagency review process that is led by the White House's Office of Management and Budget when proposing a new rule.

"This collaboration is important as other agencies may have information and expertise that could be useful to EPA. Through this process it is routine for the agency to receive input from stakeholders, including our federal partners. EPA then reviews comments and may revisit or revise proposed decisions based on that feedback," the spokesperson said.

A senior administration official separately told The Hill in an email that interagency collaboration “is important as there are a number of other agencies that have information and expertise that will undoubtedly be useful to EPA.”

Meanwhile, a coalition of states has said that the EPA should increase its restrictions on PFAS chemicals.

Reversing Course, EPA Postpones Asbestos Evaluation Review

EPA has postponed the upcoming meeting of science advisors scheduled to peer review its draft evaluation of asbestos because some of the advisors are no longer available, a change in course just weeks after officials denied requests from environmentalists and its advisors to delay the meeting because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The announcement -- postponing the April 27-30 meeting of its Science Advisory Committee On Chemicals (SACC) -- likely ensures the agency will not be able to meet its June deadline for completing all of the first 10 evaluations of existing chemicals under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), though such a milestone was highly unlikely even before the announcement.

"Given the importance of the draft risk evaluation for asbestos, the Agency believes that rescheduling for a time when more members are available is critical and will allow for a more robust review of the evaluation. As a result, the SACC meeting will be rescheduled as soon as practicable," EPA's toxics office said in an April 20 announcement. The decision is not surprising, given that some members of the asbestos peer review panel are medical doctors or public health officials and likely involved in pandemic response.

But when some advisors and the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO) raised this concern last month, EPA officials continued to prepare for the April meeting. "We are delighted the EPA finally listened to the scientific and public health communities and rescheduled the virtual SACC meeting due to the coronavirus pandemic," ADAO President Linda Reinstein said in an April 20 statement. "When the time is right, we look forward to working with experts to submit the scientific evidence for the SACC's review that will undoubtedly lead the EPA to prohibit imports and use of asbestos in the United States."

ADAO has been concerned by the content of the draft evaluation, which excludes legacy uses of asbestos, and some diseases associated with asbestos exposure, such as asbestosis, to focus on mesothelioma and lung cancer.

"EPA has had more than 30 years to study the risk of asbestos, a known carcinogen, and take action," Reinstein's statement says. "Despite this, they are on track to fail Americans again thanks to the deadly exclusions in the draft risk evaluation that will continue to threaten the public."

ADAO officials in a March 30 letter urged Administrator Andrew Wheeler to put the next peer review meeting and associated "public comment on hold until the current crisis is resolved and the scientific and medical community can give the draft evaluation the time and attention it deserves."

Virtual Meeting

The now-postponed meeting was scheduled to be held as a virtual meeting, like SACC's last meeting in March, where panelists peer reviewed the agency's draft evaluation of the common solvent trichloroethylene (TCE).

But some panelists raised concerns at that meeting about the viability of conducting peer review remotely and about conducting the asbestos meeting in April.

SACC member Henry Anderson, formerly the chief medical officer for Wisconsin, reminded EPA that SACC members will have their hands full writing the peer review report on TCE. He also said some SACC panelists are medical doctors or public health officials busy with coronavirus response.

"It might be worth ... [discussing] do we really want to move forward [with] a full week [meeting] in April. I wonder if [it would] not be best to postpone for the May dates," Anderson said, apparently referencing dates in May that SACC members have been asked to reserve for another peer review meeting.

Anderson added that "for those of us in the public health field we're in for, in the next month or so, really ramping things up. I'd ask EPA to look at whether it is really critically important to have the next meeting in April?"

After Anderson's remarks at the March 27 meeting, SACC Chairman Ken Portier said he would discuss the concern with SACC's EPA liaison. "I've heard [those] comments from a number of members," Portier said.

EPA does not provide further detail on why it chose to postpone the peer review meeting. It does indicate that it “does not anticipate extending the written public comment period on the draft risk evaluation past the June 2, 2020, due date [but] as needs arise EPA will review and respond appropriately.”

EPA is working against a June deadline to complete its first 10 evaluations of existing chemicals, as Congress directed in its 2016 overhaul of the 40-year-old TSCA. The June deadline is already a statutorily-allowed six-month extension from TSCA’s general three-year deadline for completing such evaluations -- though EPA’s toxics chief, Alex Dunn, has acknowledged that for some chemicals those deadlines may slide in order to achieve quality evaluations. The draft evaluation for asbestos represents the ninth of the first 10 that EPA has released for public comment and peer review by SACC. The 10th evaluation, of another common solvent, perchloroethylene, has yet to be released. -- *Maria Hegstad* (mhegstad@iwpnews.com)

Attorneys general push EPA to tighten import regs for toxins

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2020/04/20/stories/1062925673>

Ariana Figueroa, E&E News reporter

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A coalition of attorneys general is pressing EPA to expand a proposed rule that would restrict the use of toxic chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, in consumer products.

"These forever chemicals taint our water, damage public health, and harm the environment," California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D) said in a statement. "The science is indisputable. It's time for the EPA to step up and do its job."

The coalition of 18 attorneys general argued that importers of products made with PFAS, rather than only importers of products coated with the chemicals, should have to notify the agency for approval. The new stipulation would broaden EPA's proposed rulemaking for significant new use rule for long-chain PFAS.

"This represented a significant change from the agency's original proposal which would have applied those procedures to articles that contain certain long-chain PFAS anywhere within the article, not just in surface coatings," the AGs wrote in April 17 [public comments](#).

PFAS is a class of about 7,000 chemicals that are used in a variety of consumer products such as carpets, nonstick cookware and firefighting foam. Studies now link the chemicals to multiple health problems such as immune issues and some cancers.

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee ranking member Tom Carper (D-Del.) has raised similar concerns about the rule and has called on the agency to resist intervention from the White House to weaken those restrictions (*E&E Daily*, April 20).

The AGs suggested that the agency strengthen the proposal by including the entire PFAS family in the rule, not just some of the long-chain substances.

Betsy Southerland, a former EPA senior career official, said that while most companies in the United States have phased out the use of long-chain PFAS, people can still be exposed to the chemicals if those products made with the long-chain chemicals are still allowed to be imported.

"While we say that 'at least the long-chain chemicals we're not exposed to,' but that's not true if we are importing products that still have them in there because their countries of origin in those products do not ban those long-chain chemicals," Southerland said.

Attorneys general from California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin signed off on the comments.

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CDC: Calls to poison centers surged since onset of pandemic

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2020/04/21/stories/1062934157>

Ariana Figueroa, E&E News reporter Published: Tuesday, April 21, 2020



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's headquarters in Atlanta. Brett Weinstein/Flickr

Reports of exposure to cleaners and disinfectants increased significantly in March, likely due to concerns over the novel coronavirus, according to a new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Yesterday's [report](#) found that from January to March, poison centers experienced a 20% jump in exposure calls related to cleaners and a 16% increase in calls related to disinfectants.

Chemical exposures from January to March of this year were reported to the National Poison Data System (NPDS), CDC and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. Those exposures were then compared with the same three-month period in 2019 and 2018.

"Although NPDS data do not provide information showing a definite link between exposures and COVID-19 cleaning efforts, there appears to be a clear temporal association with increased use of these products," according to the study.

In one case, CDC said a woman "heard on the news to clean all recently purchased groceries before consuming them," so she filled her sink with hot water, vinegar and a 10% bleach solution to soak her produce. As she started to clean other groceries, she smelled "chlorine" and started to have difficulty breathing, according to the report. She was taken to the hospital and discharged a few hours later.

Advertisement

CDC found that calls about exposures among children 5 or younger "consistently represented a large percentage of total calls in the 3-month study period for each year."

In another case, a preschool-aged child was found unresponsive after ingesting ethanol-based hand sanitizer. She was admitted to a pediatric intensive care unit and went home after 48 hours.

The Food and Drug Administration has also expressed concerns about an increase in reports of children ingesting hand sanitizer. That is one of the reasons the agency has refused to relax requirements for distilleries and ethanol plants that have pivoted to making hand sanitizer during the pandemic. FDA requires those industries to add a bitterant to sanitizers to deter children from ingesting the substance (*Greenwire*, April 6).

CDC also said that of the calls received, exposures to bleach cleaners "accounted for the largest percentage of the increase" at 62%, whereas calls for non-alcohol disinfectants and hand sanitizers made up 36.7%.

There were two limitations in the report, CDC said. The first is that the NPDS data likely underestimated the "total incidence and severity of poisonings, because they are limited to persons calling poison centers for assistance." The second limitation is that there is no way for NPDS to know for sure whether the exposures are due to concerns over COVID-19 because that information is not recorded.

"Although a causal association cannot be demonstrated, the timing of these reported exposures corresponded to increased media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of consumer shortages of cleaning and disinfection products, and the beginning of some local and state stay-at-home orders," CDC said.

Bloomberg Law: Trump EPA's Constraints on Science Advisers Unlawful, Court Says

The Trump administration violated the law when it tightened membership requirements for powerful EPA advisory boards, a federal court ruled Tuesday.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit agreed with Physicians for Social Responsibility and other groups that said the Environmental Protection Agency's policy conflicted with federal ethics regulations and the Administrative Procedure Act.

In a unanimous opinion, the three-judge panel determined the EPA failed to explain why it adopted a policy—barring EPA grant recipients from advisory boards—that conflicted with recommendations from the federal Office of Government Ethics.

“The Administrator’s failure to address OGE and EPA’s contrary conclusions is especially glaring given that the prior regime existed, in part, for the very purpose of facilitating the critical role played by EPA’s scientific advisory committees,” Judge David S. Tatel wrote for the court.

"As noted above," he added, "EPA operates pursuant to multiple statutory mandates requiring that its decisions rest on various formulations of 'the best available science.'"

The plaintiffs and the EPA didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Directive Out in 2017

The EPA issued the directive in 2017, barring anyone who receives EPA grant money from serving on teams of outside experts that advise the agency on important scientific and technical issues, including air quality, chemicals, and environmental justice.

The agency said the change was necessary to eliminate potential pro-agency bias on the boards.

Critics said the policy was designed to keep the most qualified experts off advisory committees and make room for industry-friendly replacements.

Physicians for Social Responsibility, the National Hispanic Medical Association, the International Society for Children's Health and the Environment, and three scientists sued over the policy in 2017, lost their case in district court, and appealed to the D.C. Circuit.

Other challengers filed lawsuits in Massachusetts and New York. The U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York struck down the EPA's policy in a pair of recent decisions, and a federal appeals court revived the Massachusetts case in March.

The D.C. Circuit case is *Physicians for Soc. Responsibility v. Wheeler*, D.C. Cir., No. 19-5104, 4/21/20.

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